

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRD, VE, CU

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN TRADE TEAM TO CUBA

1. SUMMARY - THE HEAD OF A RECENT VENEZUELAN TRADE MISSION TO CUBA TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT LITTLE WAS ACCOMPLISHED BEYOND A PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF TRADE POSSIBILITIES. MORE IMPORTANT TALKS ARE TAKING PLACE BETWEEN MARAVEN (EX-SHELL OIL) AND THE CUBANS REGARDING PETROLEUM EXPORTS.

2. AMBASSADOR FRANCOIS MOANACK, DIRECTOR GENERAL, FOREIGN TRADE INSTITUTE, VISITED CUBA EARLIER THIS MONTH AS HEAD OF A VENEZUELAN TRADE MISSION. MOANACK TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THE VISIT STEMMED FROM RECENT CONTACTS AT SELA MEETINGS. THE VISIT, ACCORDING TO MOANACK, WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A PRELIMINARY ATTEMPT TO EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES OF REVIVING SOME TRADE BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND CUBA. MOANACK WAS NOT SURE AT THIS POINT WHETHER CUBA REALLY INTENDS TO REORIENT ITS TRADE MORE TOWARDS THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE. NEVERTHELESS, ACCORDING TO MOANACK, THERE APPEARS TO BE SOME INTEREST IN CUBA IN SECURING ACCESS TO SUPPLIES OF ESSENTIAL MATERIALS. HE POINTED OUT THAT MARAVEN (THE NATIONALIZED REMNANT OF SHELL OIL CO. OF VENEZUELA) IS NOW EXPLORING AN ARRANGEMENT WITH CUBA FOR OIL EXPORTS.

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3. MOANACK WAS NOT HOPEFUL THAT CUBA CAN OFFER PRODUCTS WHICH WILL INTEREST VENEZUELA. CUBA SUGAR IS TOO EXPENSIVE, HE SAID, CONSIDERING VENEZUELA'S OPTION OF BUYING ON THE NEW YORK MARKET AT THE LOWER INTERNATIONAL PRICE. VENEZUELA IMPORTS VERY LITTLE NICKEL, ANOTHER COMMODITY OFFERED BY CUBA. THERE IS SOME DEMAND FOR CUBAN TOBACCO, BUT MOANACK HUMOROUSLY DOUBTED THAT VENEZUELANS CAN SMOKE ENOUGH CUBAN CIGARS TO OFFSET ANY SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF OIL EXPORTS. MOANACK SAID VENEZUELA IS ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO ANY FORM OF BARTER - THE CUBANS ARE WELL AWARE THAT VENEZUELA WILL INSIST ON PAYMENT IN HARD CURRENCIES.

4. ACCORDING TO MOANACK, PRODUCT LISTS EXCHANGED WILL BE ANALYZED, BUT NO COMMITMENT WAS MADE AS TO THE TIME AND PLACE OF A SECOND MEETING WITH THE CUBANS.

5. COMMENT - MOANACK'S VISIT TO CUBA IS APPARENTLY PART OF A CAUTIOUS VENEZUELAN EFFORT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH CUBA, WHICH REACHED THEIR NADIR DURING THE ANGOLA WAR. VENEZUELA IS, IN FACT, GENUINELY INTERESTED IN REGAINING ITS LOST CUBAN OIL MARKET. MARAVEN IS NOT LIKELY TO OFFER THE CUBANS ANY SPECIAL TERMS ON OIL, BUT VENEZUELA MAY BE DISPOSED TO LEND SOME ENCOURAGEMENT TO CUBAN IMPORTS IF AN OIL DEAL IS STRUCK.

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